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## Article

# Sustainable and Integrated Urban Planning and Governance in Metropolitan and Medium-Sized Cities

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the design and implementation process of Integrated Strategies for Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD), as well as their main effects and lessons learned in two European cities: Barcelona in Spain, a vibrant European metropolis, and Évora in Portugal, a medium-sized city with a world heritage historic centre. The former is facing socioeconomic challenges in some of its neighbourhoods, while the latter, a regional capital of an already depopulated region, Alentejo, is facing further depopulation and socioeconomic challenges. Following from a qualitative analysis of ISUD and other urban plans implemented in past decades, the article employs a framework with five analytical dimensions, based on the policy cycle (priority setting, participatory approaches, implementation strategy, collaboration networks, and measuring results and impact). These provide a framework to identify best practices. The findings demonstrate that ISUD in both cities provides impetus for sustainable strategic planning, but can be strengthened in particular via the active involvement of citizens and stakeholders in the elaboration and implementation of these ISUD. Conversely, the results demonstrate mounting challenges that many urban planners in medium-sized towns face in relation to inverting depopulation trends, raising further questions of to what extent European Cohesion policy, and ISUD in particular, can contribute to territorial cohesion objectives whilst also aiming to achieve other policy goals.

**Keywords:** integrated strategies for sustainable urban development; urban planning; sustainable development; urban governance; participatory approaches

## 1. Introduction

Urban areas are engines of territorial development and catalysts for innovation and creativity. Approximately 70% of European Union (EU) inhabitants reside in urban areas, which generate more than two thirds of the EU's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [1]. Urban areas are, however, places marked by many persistent problems, such as poverty, segregation, unemployment, and environmental pressures [2]. Crucially, urbanization processes are normally associated with enormous environmental consequences. Cities account for more than half of the world's population and two thirds of global energy demand and greenhouse emissions [3]. In this light, effective urban development planning can only be achieved through an integrated and sustainable approach.

Despite being directly and indirectly supported by EU funding for some time, namely through the URBAN Initiative [4], the goal of integrated and sustainable urban development has gained a new momentum under the EU Cohesion Policy 2014–2020 period. More pointedly, around 10 billion euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will be directly allocated to Integrated

Strategies for Sustainable Urban Development—ISUD, whilst about 750 cities have been funded to implement these strategies [5].

In a significant number of cases, the ISUD rationale is supported by new delivery tools such as Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). Through these tools, funding from several priority axes of one or more operational programmes for multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral interventions can be bundled [6–8], so that public interventions are more effective [9]. However, existing evaluations regarding the implementation of ISUD are largely confined to the design stage and are mainly focused on their added value to the institutional and governance frameworks of their implementation process [10].

From a policy standpoint, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities [11] postulates that integrated urban development is a process in which spatial, sectoral, and temporal aspects of key areas of urban policy are co-ordinated. For Ferry et al. [12], the formulation of integrated policy responses has three distinct levels: (i) Strategic: To strengthen synergies between different strategic frameworks; (ii) Monetary: To combine different funding sources to support place-based integration; and (iii) Operational: To develop integrated activities on the ground. A recent position paper by ESPON [13] concludes that integrated approaches including ITI are highly complex, and that a qualitative evaluation approach can be a valuable addition to their evaluation framework, particularly in terms of determining their added value.

As stressed in a recent European Commission report [14], in a broader meaning, this integrated approach to urban development underlines the importance of going beyond sectoral policy implementation approaches in order to strengthening potential urban development synergies. Similarly, a sound ISUD implementation process requires both a multi-level governance and a place-based approach, thus stimulating close cooperation across all territorial levels and across a myriad of stakeholders. In this sense, the ISUD implementation goes beyond urban administrative boundaries in several domains, since it requires a strategic connection with regional and national territorial planning guidelines. Finally, as the presented cases will confirm, the ISUD targets cities of all sizes and socioeconomic levels. In essence, this ISUD approach can champion a more holistic, inter-sectoral, and multi-level governance strategic vision for pushing cities to work across several policy-areas, to better integrate multiple sources of funding, and to promote a result-oriented logic, supported by a systematic monitoring and evaluation framework.

The reason this article seeks to investigate the implementation of ISUDs is twofold: Firstly, to fill a void in available literature, since their implementation in European cities is relatively recent. Secondly, to summarise the results of a recent research project financed by the World Bank Group, which analysed several ISUD cases in Europe. The article makes a broader contribution to the literature by providing insights in terms identifying the challenges of cohesion policy (and ISUD) to address territorial cohesion goals. From a theoretical and conceptual standpoint, this paper develops and implements a novel qualitative evaluation approach to assess the main effects of ISUD, based on similar evaluation methodologies [10,15]. The proposed methodological approach is expected to fill a void in available literature on the implementation of these ISUD plans, and provides a practical framework for evaluating integrated urban planning processes. As such, it aims to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation which helps to strengthen ISUD implementation processes in urban areas across the EU27 and beyond. This methodology will be further explained in the following section.

Ultimately, the paper proposes to compare the ISUD in particular, and the urban development plans in general, of a large metropolitan urban area (Barcelona) and a regional capital, a medium-sized city located in a depopulated region (Évora), thus covering two distinct territorial scenarios. Being both located in Iberian Peninsula, Barcelona is an eloquent example of a vibrant, historic, and touristic attractive European metropolis, with a long tradition in urban planning. Likewise, Évora is an attractive touristic urban pole. Nevertheless, it provides a contrasting urban development panorama, since it represents European medium-sized cities, located in regions facing depopulation trends, and also facing demographic and socioeconomic challenges in the city historical core. The case studies

most closely represent a most different research design. They vary across a wide range of variables, but are similar in that both implement ISUD provisions that have similar high-level policy goals. Based on this contrasting analytic platform, the research intends to answer the following research questions: (i) Is the implementation of ISUD bringing positive effects to achieving urban planning goals, both in metropolitan and medium-sized urban spaces?; (ii) How different are the effects from the implementation of ISUD plans in a European metropolis and a medium-sized city?

The results will be presented in a comparable prism in the results section, with a specific topic covering the proposed evaluation elements. The final section provides a discussion, the main lessons learned, and best practice.

## 2. Research Plan and Methods

EU Cohesion Policy commands the largest budget of all EU Policies. Crucially, its urban dimension has been significantly reinforced in the current (2014–2020) programming period, whilst the scope of EU policy interventions in urban areas and in urban development has become a more prominent feature of EU policymaking. The new emphasis placed on integrated place-based approaches follows from the formalisation of territorial cohesion as an objective for the EU Treaty. More particularly, in the 2013 regulation [16], a minimum 5% of national allocations of ERDF has been earmarked for supporting ISUD, to ensure that it is a policy priority for all Member States.

In this context, the analysis is based on the hypothesis that ISUD can bring wider positive effects to achieving urban planning goals, both in metropolitan and medium-sized urban spaces, by enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanisation, as well as strengthening participatory urban governance and planning processes. In this light, the proposed research methodology follows from a Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) study, which assessed the implementation of ISUD across Europe [10], at their early stage, as well as some ideas proposed for a methodological evaluation framework by the authors [15]. The five-vector ISUD evaluation methodological framework (see Figure 1) was designed by van der Zwet to be used by the World Bank support paper, ‘Case Studies Integrated Sustainable Urban Development’ [17]. In essence, from a methodological standpoint, this approach can be universally used to assess the main effects of ISUD in enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanisation.

The proposed methodology is mostly based on desk research of urban plans, complemented with other qualitative elements of policy evaluation as well as with quantitative elements of evaluation reports (statistical data). However, the primary data sources were the ISUD strategy documents, supplemented with data collected from existing urban development plans, scientific articles, and books. Following the document analysis, a small number of interviews (7 in total) were conducted with officials in urban authorities that are responsible for implementing ISUD strategies. These include officials from both municipalities, and parishes related to the intervention areas. As expressed in a European Territorial Observatory Network (ESPON) working paper, “integrated territorial investments are complex. Therefore, sometimes people on the ground can say more about the impact by pointing out concrete examples of what has worked and what has not worked” [13] (p. 11). From this perspective, a qualitative, in-depth case study is best suited to capturing these processes.

In detail, the different analytical steps were carried out by mostly analysing the Barcelona and Évora ISUD candidacy documents, and also complementary literature (urban plans, evaluation reports, scientific publications) related with the implementation of urban planning process in both case-studies, over the past decades. As seen, the proposed analytic framework presents a quite detailed guide to organise the collection of the information required, thus helping to verify and the different rules and regulations assessed.

As much as possible, the vector by vector analysis from the proposed methodology is applied in equal terms to the two selected case studies. Intuitively, Barcelona was selected, as it is a well-known and important European metropolitan area, which has faced multiple urban development challenges over the past decades, i.e., the organisation of the Olympic Games and an increasing inflow of

tourists [18]. Conversely, Évora is an eloquent example of an historic and attractive (touristic-wise) medium-sized city in a vast depopulated territory, suffering from systematic depopulation and aging trends in its historic centre.



**Figure 1.** Analytic framework to assess the implementation of the Integrated Strategies for Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD). Own elaboration.

### 3. Brief Presentation of the Case Studies: Barcelona and Évora

Both located in Iberia Peninsula (Figure 2), the selected case studies are both rich in history and touristic attraction, as well as regional capitals. From a size perspective, however, whilst Barcelona is a large Metropolitan Area and the second largest city in Spain, Évora is a medium-sized city in the context of the Portuguese urban network. Despite this different territorial context, both cities have been implementing their ISUD with a similar overall goal of promoting urban attractiveness and ultimately urban development processes [19].

Despite being a modern and attractive city for tourism, Barcelona faces major socioeconomic and environmental challenges, which are clearly identified in its ISUD [20] and other urban development plans [21]. In the social domain, one can highlight high unemployment rates coupled with low income rents and demographic aging, leading to relative population stabilisation within the city, in contrast with a steady demographic growth of the Metropolitan Area (Table 1).

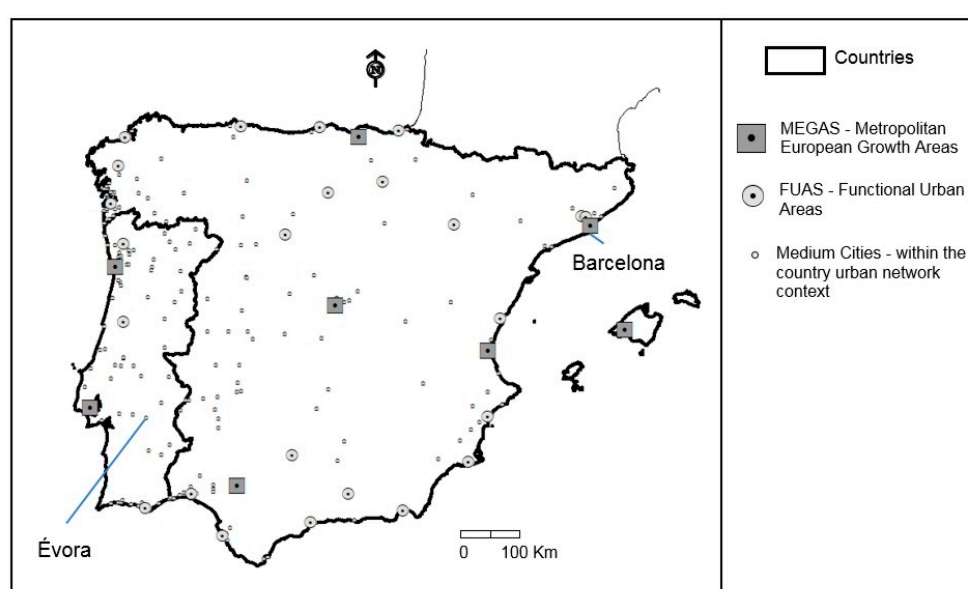


Figure 2. City hierarchy in Iberian Peninsula. Source: Own elaboration.

Table 1. Population change in Barcelona metropolitan area and the Barcelona urban area.

	1960	1970	1981	1991	2001	2011	2015	2020
Barcelona urban area	1,655,603	1,741,979	1,752,627	1,643,542	1,503,884	1,611,013	1,604,555	1,636,762
Metropolitan area	2,468,000	3,482,000	3,867,000	4,127,000	4,382,000	5,000,000	5,277,000	5,586,000

Source: Own elaboration based on Spanish demographic census + <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/spain/localities/barcelona/>.

Moreover, there are high rates of early school leaving and social vulnerability [22]. From an economic perspective, the city faces challenges related to the underuse of commercial premises and warehouses in the industrial areas. It also faces a digital divide, with a share of the population having low levels of internet connectivity and a sedentary lifestyle [20]. From an environmental prism, there is an excessive use of motorised transport modes, lack of environmental quality spaces in the harbour area, and insufficient recycling rates of industrial waste [23]. In all, the resilience levels of the city are considered as lower than desired [20], a situation that is comparable to many other large metropolitan areas in Europe.

Instead, Évora is a medium-sized one within the scope of the Portuguese territory [24] and the main urban centre in the Alentejo Portuguese NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) II, both demographically and functionally. With around 50,000 inhabitants (52,454 in the municipality),



this city is known for its walled historic centre, which has been a world heritage (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization—UNESCO) site since 1986. As the regional capital, it houses the main regional university (Universidade de Évora) and the regional administrative government (CCDR Alentejo). Its main industries include automobiles, electronic components, cork, ornamental rocks (marble), and agri-food related industries. Furthermore, information technologies and aeronautics are emergent economic activities in the municipality. Évora, just like the surrounding region, is an attractive pole for touristic activities, mainly due to the presence of the historic centre. Indeed, tertiary related economic activities, led by tourism, are the main sources of revenue for the city [25]. From a social cohesion and quality of life standpoint, Évora benefits from an appropriate set of public services, within a national context. Moreover, the University accommodates around 9000 students, and the Central District Hospital is well equipped in view of the regional needs. Nevertheless, the necessary services to meet the needs of the elderly residents in the territory are manifestly insufficient in view of the demographic structure of the municipality, which shows clear aging trends. Indeed, demographically speaking, in the past decade Évora has experienced a very low net growth in its population contingent, whilst in the historic centre, the depopulation trends have been a constant (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Population change in Évora Municipality, the urban area, and the historic centre.

	1960	1970	1981	1991	2001	2011	2015	2018
Historic Centre	12,954	10,785	8979	7842	5668	4719	4581	4457
Urban area—the city	28,652	28,186	34,851	38,994	41,278	45,530	48,000	50,000
Municipality	50,095	46,900	51,572	53,754	56,519	56,596	53,654	52,454

Source: Own elaboration based in [26–30]; Note: From 1960 to 2011, the data are based on the national census. The remaining years are based on projections. The projection for the historic centre in 2018 is for 2020.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Priority Setting

Barcelona is strongly committed to a long-term and active vision for sustainable urban development [31]. This strategic vision is in line with the Spanish Government's national guidelines to promote urban and local sustainability [32]. Barcelona's strategic vision to become a more compact, efficient, and socially cohesive city is also in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. In this context, the Barcelona ISUD strategic plan defines 11 long-term development priorities:

- (1) Address the digital divide;
- (2) Decrease the use of motor vehicles;
- (3) Improve and promote the Besòs neighbourhood as a space of environmental and heritage quality;
- (4) Increase resilience to climate change;
- (5) Reduce early school leaving;
- (6) Decrease the number of unemployed people;
- (7) Increase economic development based on local commerce, circular economy, social, and/or technological and self-containment;
- (8) Increase family income;
- (9) Decrease the number of people at risk of social exclusion;
- (10) Increase the number of people who practice sports and a healthy lifestyle;
- (11) Improve the quality of life of the elderly.

The main consideration for choosing these priorities was that they were based on the needs and perceptions of local citizens as informed by the municipality and an in-depth statistical analysis. Moreover, as the identified urban development challenges are long-standing, the ISUD strategic approach was also based on priorities set out in previous strategic urban development documents:

(i) Shared Strategy for a More Inclusive Barcelona; (ii) Civic Engagement for the Sustainability of Barcelona 2012–2022; and (iii) The Mobility Pact. The ISUD strategy drafting process also considered the necessary coordination with ongoing European, regional, and national policy frameworks. However, the ISUD strategy was also informed by the guidelines provided by the Spanish Institute which manages EU Funds. These were in the form of a menu of specific thematic objectives on which the priorities should be based. These objectives also served as guidance to the overarching objective of the Operational Programme (OP) in which the ISUD strategies are embedded. Moreover, the strategy was aligned to the national guidelines to promote urban and local sustainability.

At the metropolitan level, the strategic approach to the urban development process is defined in the current (2020) Barcelona Metropolitan Strategic Plan—PEMB [32]. Just like the ISUD, the PEMB follows a strong participatory approach and collaborative leadership. For example, in 2008, when the development vision until 2020 was presented, more than 650 people participated in various working groups to discuss the future of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) [33]. The AMB provides a framework to integrate, in a single platform, the design and implementation of a metropolitan strategic plan, which has existed since the abolition of the Barcelona Metropolitan Corporation in 1987. Approved in 2010, the Barcelona Vision 2020 proposes a strategic vision which gives new prominence to building relationships with emergent economies that are likely to be future drivers of growth [34]. Ultimately, this strategic vision prioritises urban restructuring and the promotion of a knowledge-based economy [35,36].

The new (2030) strategic vision for the AMB is due to be released this year (2020). A central line of this new PEMB will be the promotion of social and economic progress based on innovation and sustainability as a mechanism for reducing inequalities and spatial segregation in the metropolitan area. As such, the development of this new plan is based on three major strategic pillars: (i) A resilient metropolis; (ii) A prosperous metropolis; and (iii) A cohesive metropolis. In this light, it is possible to conclude the relevance of the ISUD strategy to achieve these metropolitan goals, which ultimately intend to: (i) Combat growing inequalities; (ii) Fight against climate change, absorb the impact of digitalisation, and achieve the integration of migrants; (iii) Articulate more effective metropolitan policies; and (iv) Promote instruments of governance which strengthen democracy, public-private-communitarian collaboration, and citizen participation at all territorial scales [37].

Within this particularly worrying demographic scenario, in a city with a valuable cultural and educational heritage, which also provides significant employment, Évora's ISUD highlights three main challenges for the future:

- (1) Conceive and streamline urban intervention strategies to respond to challenges that result from the need to attract new economic investment and that function as drivers for attracting new residents;
- (2) Mobilize the competitive advantages of the city's territorial assets by financing public policies, and creating new dynamics of private investment capable of maximising economic and employment opportunities related to the Urban Rehabilitation and Regeneration Cluster. Support activities based on micro and small business initiatives for employment and skills; and
- (3) Constitute an active example of intelligence and creativity in the implementation of the 2020 Sustainable Cities Strategy, involving resources and urban partners in a commitment to interventions combined in the physical dimension of urban space in economic development, social inclusion, education, and environmental protection; thus, reinforcing urban structuring and improving the quality of life of populations in an urban environment.

As expected, the ISUD strategy [20] invoked the need to relaunch the city investment dynamics towards the attraction of new residents in response to the demographic decline, in particular in the historic core. It proposed to achieve these goals by reinforcing social cohesion factors; supporting regeneration and activities to support the elderly population; and by providing better access to health and personal services. In this context, the ISUD strategy defined the following three strategic priorities:



- (1) Streamline the urban revitalization of Évora through targeted strategic and operational interventions for structuring innovative and competitive economic functions that attract new investment, as well as attracting and retaining residents with new skills and talents;
- (2) Promote the multifunctionality of the traditional city by contributing to the revitalization of the economic fabric and by involving public and private partners in a strategy for the regeneration of heritage building (economic equipment, housing, ... ) and also by contributing to the renewal of tourism demand and associated activities;
- (3) Qualify and integrate central urban areas by encouraging interventions for social inclusion and territorial cohesion, via Évora Municipality and social network partners, in order to provide quality of life to residents and increase the city attractiveness.

From a bigger picture perspective, and due to its vast experience in implementing urban development plans, the Évora Municipality was the main body responsible to set the ISUD priorities, which took into account the implementation of the following pre-existing plans: PRID—Degraded Residential Recovery Programme, the Protocol for Housing Recovery in the historic centre, the Housing Recovery Programme of the historic centre, the URBCOM (Incentive System for Commercial Urbanism Projects—Sistema de Incentivos a Projectos de Urbanismo Comercial), the PROCOM (Support Program for Commerce Modernization—Programa de Apoio à Modernização do Comércio), the POLIS programme, the Tourism Intervention Programme, the RUCI (Urban Networks for Competitiveness and Innovation—Redes Urbanas para a Competitividade e a Inovação), the Blue Corridor and the PRU (Urban Rehabilitation Program—Programa de Reabilitação urbana) ACRÓPOLE XXI, amongst others (see Appendix A Table A1). All these plans focused on concrete urban problems in specific socioeconomically deprived and physically decaying neighbourhoods, in order to stimulate economic activity, promote social inclusion, and physically restore buildings. Acting as the technical and policy coordinator, as well as the monitoring and evaluation unit, the Évora Municipality involved public and private actors in the territory to design and implement these urban development programmes (see Section 4.2 for further details).

The strategy followed top down guidance from national (PNPOT—Programa Nacional da Política de Ordenamento do Território) and regional (PROT—Plano regional de Ordenamento do Território) spatial planning directives, as well as directives from the Portuguese Cohesion Policy Framework for the 2014–2020 period (Portugal 2020) [38]. The influence of these overarching frameworks is most recognisable in the goal to promote social and territorial cohesion and an integrated and sustainable policy approach. In more detail, this policy articulation was operationalised with ongoing social related interventions and plans (Social Development Plan of Évora, CLDS 3G—Local Contract for Social Development/Contrato Local de Desenvolvimento Social, Escolhas Programme, DLBC—Community Based Local Development/Desenvolvimento Local de Base Comunitária, and other Portugal 2020 actions).

As can be seen, the urban planning challenges of a large metropolitan area such as Barcelona, despite having some confluent policy goals with a medium-sized city such as Évora, show some visible distinctions. For one, and understandably, Barcelona's planning vision has a more global and metropolitan approach, by invoking climate change and metropolitan integration policy planning goals. Instead, the Évora strategy is more focused on the municipality level, and very much in its historic centre. On the whole, by comparing these two case-studies, the analysis has the advantage of encompassing a wide array of similar cases, both in Europe and globally. In the end, this comparison intends to unveil in what measure a long-term planning vision on both cities is being translated into meaningful objectives, which is not always easy.

#### 4.2. Participatory Approaches

Participatory approaches to planning are largely embedded in normative goals based on democracy and participation, community expectations, and legal requirements. Concomitantly, there is a need to support the creation of participatory, adaptable, and responsive planning processes [39]. Here,

the Barcelona ISUD strategy is an eloquent example of a highly collaborative and shared governance approach in elaborating an urban development plan. In essence, its elaboration took into account the participation of citizens, the main economic, social, and institutional agents, and the city urban development policymakers. This participatory approach was organised via 'The Citizen Agreement' for an inclusive Barcelona (ACBI), which is a space for co-production and co-management of social inclusion policies and projects for Barcelona. The ACBI is an assembly made up by 603 economic, social, and cultural entities. It includes an Executive Commission of 14 entities as well as a Government Council. The latter is presided by the municipality and comprises 27 entities. The consultation approach was designed by the municipality and took the following steps, always using a participatory and collaborative approach with the organised civil society [20]:

- (1) The projects and actions that are being carried out are included or arranged to develop both social entities and the city council through its Inclusion Plan;
- (2) The project plans analysed in order to identify to which city objectives they respond;
- (3) Based on the urban development trends, a set of objectives to be implemented are defined;
- (4) A comparative analysis of steps 2–3 forms a proposal for an initial strategy which includes: A vision, strategic guidelines, and projects;
- (5) The proposal is discussed in a participatory and shared mode, and the commitment of action from the participating actors is obtained, on the basis of which a new strategic proposal is elaborated;
- (6) The framework for promoting and monitoring the approved action plans is agreed; and
- (7) The shared strategy is approved.

In sum, the participatory approaches used by the city of Barcelona are supported by existing organisations and pacts which involve citizens and a diverse range of other actors. These were consulted at the strategy design phase. One example is the 'Citizen Commitment to Sustainability of Barcelona 2012–2022'. This is a shared project for all citizens and organisations, which aims to contribute to the improvement of the city sustainability process. This pact is expressed in a document and connected to a defined goal of the intervention strategy. The theme identifies 10 main goals, and each of these has 10 action lines with a horizon for 2022. This document was elaborated in 2012 in an open and participatory process by around 800 entities. These included: (i) Civic NGOs (Non-governmental organization); (ii) Companies, business organizations, trade associations, and unions; (iii) Universities; (iv) Educational centres, from nursery schools to high school centres and training cycles; (v) Professional colleges; (vi) Syndicates; (vii) Public institutions, autonomous organizations, public companies; and (viii) Political groups.

Likewise, the Évora municipality has had vast experience in managing urban development projects involving a significant number of actors, both public and private. This consolidated experience facilitated a participatory approach to implement ISUD in its several action plans (PARU—Urban Rehabilitation, PMUS—Urban Sustainable Mobility, and PAICD—Disadvantaged Communities). All these action plans are strongly associated with the involvement of targeted partners and other potential partners capable of mobilising investment operations. These include, in particular, public entities, partnership institutions in the social domain, business associations, traders, and other private owners [25]. There were positive impactful outcomes from the participatory approach with the involved entities, mainly due to past positive experiences. However, the capacity of each partner to contribute to the overall implementation of the ISUD goals is dependent on their financial situation at any moment in time [40].

#### 4.3. Implementation Strategy

Urban planning processes normally follow different stages, starting from strategic planning, continuing with an implementation phase, and ending up in an evaluation stage [41]. Far from signalling the end of the urban planning operation, the implementation phase presents the opportunity to translate the strategic priorities and objectives into actions. This translation from plan to reality [42]

is not without its difficulties. In this regard, the Barcelona ISUD incorporates a concrete plan for its implementation by relating the defined eleven challenges (see Section 4.1) and fourteen action measures (Table 3). In practical terms, the ISUD is implemented via a chronogram with concrete interventions to take place between 2016 and 2019, identified in thematic and specific objectives (see Appendix A Table A2).

In synthesis, the implementation of the ISUD is expected to create new attractive urban poles in currently socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods, thus generating a more balanced and polycentric metropolitan urban network. Likewise, the sustainable development approach of the ISUD is integrated within a metropolitan strategic commitment to improve the conservation of public and green spaces, and biodiversity, as expressed in the ‘New Metropolitan Territorial Plan of Barcelona’, and the city environmental report ‘Barcelona; city committed to the environment’.

**Table 3.** Typologies of action measures of the Barcelona ISUD. Potential effects (0—minimum to 3—maximum) of each measure to the urban development process of the city.

Measures	Challenge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Σ
1. Technology for integration		2	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	2	11
2. Technology promotion		2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	11
4. Mobility promotion (foot and bicycle)		0	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	13
5. Mobility plan for the industrial areas		0	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	13
6. Reduction of private vehicles traffic		0	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	13
8. Water memory		0	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	2	2	10
9. Civic access to the river		0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	12
11. Employment training		2	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	13
12. Local development for jobs		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	22
13. Support to social services		1	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	2	2	22	11
14. Improve access and accessibility to housing		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	4
Total		9	10	12	12	8	7	16	8	16	15	20	

Source: Own elaboration based on [20].

On its part, the Évora Municipality is politically and operationally responsible for the implementation of the ISUD. However, it works in partnership with the other relevant actors for the urban development processes. In essence, the ISUD strategy is translated into actions by a proposed governance model, which integrates two governance levels: (i) The strategic level: Strategic direction is provided by the Urban Authority (Évora Municipality). It includes the Municipality President, the Councillor of Urbanism/Culture, the Councillor of the social area and the department leaders of the divisions involved in the implementation of the actions plans, and (ii) The operational level: The Municipality President is principally responsible for the operational level, but delegates the operational competences to an operational coordinator with the goal to: Coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the ISUD strategy and assure the necessary information and preparation of elements for discussing its implementation of the ISUD at all levels; develop and validate opinions on the project’s execution and the implementation of the action plans; ensure the operational articulation with all involved partners at all territorial levels; mobilise all the local partners to prepare and execute the projects and relevant actions of the ISUD; develop and manage the monitoring system of the ISUD, whilst assuring the creation and functioning of a system which collects and organises information to ensure a proper monitoring and evaluation procedure. In sum, the Évora ISUD candidacy document has resulted in a total of 23,893,891€ to implement the strategy. This is done via identification of investment priorities and respective axis/measures (see Appendix A Table A3) [25].

#### 4.4. Collaboration Networks

Urban Networking has the potential to build and reinforce trust and social capital amongst urban centres [43]. When it comes to a large metropolitan area such as Barcelona, the vast majority of the collaboration networks to implement urban development plans, including ISUD, have an intra-city character. These collaboration structures engage both citizens and a myriad of entities, including NGOs, public and autonomous entities, universities and other educational entities, unions and syndicates, political entities, and many other stakeholders. This type of collaboration networking process is engaged via existing collaboration networks such as the aforementioned ‘Citizen Commitment to Sustainability of Barcelona 2012–2022’. As seen, these collaborative networks were already established and active long before the ISUD strategy was implemented, and were adapted to the present project via the creation of specific online forums to share opinions and contributions to the ISUD strategy [20].

At an inter-city level, the elaboration of the ISUD resulted from an intense networking approach with regional, national, and EU entities. Most notably, it benefited from the establishment of a Network for Urban Initiatives (RIU), which coordinates, promotes, and supports the management and the evaluation of actions regarding urban matters, co-financed by EU Structural Funds. In addition, these collaboration networks were extensive to the URBACT programme and the unique actions for a low carbon economy. The RIU represents the main coordination mechanism in urban development and community funds, and constitutes an open forum of exchange of experiences and good urban practices that have received community funding, provided knowledge on responses to possible problems, and/or doubts raised by the application of the European funds regulations for urban development. Alongside this, a Network of ISUD Strategies of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona has been created, which includes four urban areas of Catalonia: Sabadell, Sant Boi de Llobregat, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and Barcelona. This network acts as a forum for work and exchange of experiences. It also provides possibilities for further collaboration in other urban development processes and plans.

In the case of the Évora ISUD, some key intra and intra-municipal partners form a ‘monitoring commission’ and include the Municipality, the President of the Municipal Assembly, the technical secretariat coordinator, the President of the Regional Authority (CCDR Alentejo), the Civil Governor of Évora, the President of the Trade Association of Évora, the President of the Region Entrepreneurs Nucleus of Évora, the President of young entrepreneurs—Évora delegation, the President of the Évora Farmers Association, a member of the workers’ syndicates, a member of the regional entity for promoting tourism; and the President of the Association of Students of Évora University.

However, in terms of the new collaboration structure created for the ISUD, the members have mostly an intra-city character (Évora University, local parishes, the municipal company for managing urban development (Habevora), a Foundation, and City Holy House of Mercy). Two entities from this group have, nevertheless, an inter-city character. These are the Regional Entity for Tourism (ERTA) and the Évora district trade association (ACDE). In all, no pre-existing structure was adapted for the ISUD implementation. In terms of inter-city collaboration, there has been especially strong relations with the regional authority (CCDR—Alentejo) which manages all the Alentejo ISUDs. Hence, this institutional collaboration occurs frequently and is particularly relevant in the submission, approval, and evaluation phases of the ISUD.

#### 4.5. Measuring Results and Impact

Ultimately, all public related investments need to justify their *raison d’être*, by demonstrating not only their immediate outcomes and results, but mostly their impacts in the intended development processes [44–46]. Concomitantly, there is a need to provide a sound methodological proposal in the design phase of an urban strategy with a view to assessing its main potential impacts. This includes the definition of potential policy evaluation indicators. In the case of Barcelona, the vast quantity of ongoing planning instruments demanded a detailed framework for measuring their impact. As a matter of simplification, the Barcelona ISUD ex-ante evaluation process was based on assigning a rating of 0 to 3 to each of the objectives contained in the instruments, according to their degree of potential

impact (assessed via a criterion established by an external consultant company + urban development department of the city of Barcelona) on each of the prioritized Thematic Objectives (see Table 2). This means that the evaluation process did not use a specific Impact Assessment (IA) or a more holistic Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) methodology applied to ex-ante, mid-term, or ex-post policy evaluation phases.

The monitoring and evaluation framework was built and managed by the municipality (Executive Commission), together with an external company specialised in managing urban funds, by allocating a set of evaluation indicators to each defined measure/objective of the strategy in a group of detailed fiches. The indicators of the ISUD serve to assess the degree of achievement of the objectives, by establishing a set of initial or base values and values expected in 2023. These indicators can be: (i) Outcome/monitoring indicators: Linked to the specific established objectives that contribute to solving the challenges of the urban area, or (ii) Productivity indicators: A direct consequence of programme operations and linked to the degree of execution of the Strategy Implementation Plan (Table 4):

**Table 4.** Selected Indicators for monitoring and assessing the Barcelona ISUD.

Objective/Measure		Production Indicator		Monitoring Indicator	
1.	Technology for integration	-	Number of users covered by electronic public services	-	Users affected by the ISUD programmes
2.	Technology Promotion			-	Number of internet users
3 and 7	Strategy Implementation	-	Number of users covered by electronic public services	-	Achievement of internal objectives set in the coordination and management process

Source: Own elaboration based on [20].

As in all the other aspects of the ISUD strategy, the monitoring and evaluation framework and the selection of the indicators were the final responsibility of the municipality, which worked together with an external consultant company. However, the webpage on which the monitoring and evaluation process should be presented is basically inactive, and the evaluation reports are not accessible on online platforms. This raises some questions about transparency and accountability in relation to the implementation of the ISUD strategy. Finally, the ISUD strategy takes into consideration its potential impacts on a city metropolitan level. This analysis is done for the economic, social, environmental, demographic, and climate related challenges, and for each of the intervention areas.

Likewise, the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Évora ISUD was developed by the external consultant company, which designed the strategy together with the Alentejo Central Inter Municipal Community (CIMAC). A technical structure within the municipality was created to ensure a functioning system, which collects and treats all the necessary information for a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the ISUD strategy. At the same time, this technical structure can propose measures for reorienting and discussing the ISUD at a strategic level. This monitoring and evaluation framework was specifically developed for the ISUD following the proposal of the Division for Economic Development and the approval of the Municipality President and Assembly [25].

With the goal of making the monitoring and evaluation framework as effective and efficient as possible, some mechanisms were implemented to streamline the monitoring and evaluation processes. Firstly, the monitoring process is understood in a constructive perspective. This means that it is operated in collaboration with the project' promoters and other involved entities as a means to unblock obstacles that are encountered. This process is implemented via several procedures, all of them associated with the regular activity of the different levels of adopted management methods. The technical unit, which can be supported by external consultants, is responsible to monitor the implementation of ongoing projects, via the designation of a specific technician for each action. Here,



they will mainly adopt a monitoring perspective and indicators (Table 5), for all the activities and components of each operation. At a wider level, the Urban Authority will ensure the monitoring of the implementation of the ISUD strategy by using the information provided by the technical unit. Here, it will provide a statement in a meeting to take place twice a month. Secondly, the monitoring process will be centred on the obtained results based on the following mechanisms:

- (1) An information system (IS): Containing realisation and result indicators and the respective goals. The IS incorporates a clear definition of the method and periodicity for collecting the necessary information;
- (2) Chain of command: The collected information (sources, methods), its aggregation, systematisation, treatment, analysis, and the elaboration of reports is well defined within the management chain.

**Table 5.** Examples of selected indicators for monitoring and assessing the Évora ISUD.

Investment Priority		Realisation Indicator		Result Indicator
06.05—Improving urban environment	-	Open spaces created or rehabilitated in urban areas	-	Increased degree of satisfaction of residents in the areas of intervention
	-	Public or commercial buildings constructed or renovated		
	-	Rehabilitated housing in urban areas		
09.08—Physical, economic, and social regeneration of disadvantaged communities	-	Rehabilitated housing in urban areas	-	Increased degree of satisfaction of residents in the areas of intervention
04.05—The promotion of low carbon urban development strategies	-	Urban mobility plans implemented	-	Estimated greenhouse gas emissions
	-	Roads dedicated to smooth mobility or reducing emissions		
	-	Multimodal interfaces supported		

Source: Own elaboration based on [25].

Every six months, the monitoring panel meets, and a synthesis of the obtained physical and financial indicators is prepared, with short comments on the most relevant aspects of the ISUD strategy implementation. These are made available to the public. Six-monthly reports will then be produced with more detailed information, by including an overall municipality analysis and a critical reading of the progress achieved as well as the main critical factors, proposing corrective measures whenever necessary. Finally, an annual monitoring report will be produced. From an evaluation perspective, two mechanisms are defined: (i) Self-evaluation, which incorporates the information from the monitoring system with the result indicators of the management structure at all levels; and (ii) External evaluation, which incorporates an external and independent reading.

However, so far, the only evaluation report available for public consultation is the one prepared by the CIMAC to assess the implementation of the Alentejo Central (NUT 3) ISUDs [47]. This report claims that, between 2014 and 2018, Évora Municipality lost 3.3% of its population. This is a clear indication that all the previously mentioned urban development plans have not fully succeeded in inverting demographic losses. These are particularly significant in the historic centre (Table 1), which is also the city area facing higher aging indexes. Furthermore, as concluded by the aforementioned report, this demographic loss is associated with a deteriorating tendency of the quality of basic services, over the past years.

Similarly, another study claims that the Évora urban development plans in past years have not fully contributed to achieving their main goals of retaining the young and physically renovating the



city. This can be seen by the constant presence of these goals in all the analysed urban development plans. One explanation advanced is the lack of or insufficient organizational capacity and mobilization of entities and agents, as well as the insufficient financial resources, that have hampered the impact of the initiatives [42]. However, this does not mean that the planned interventions did not contribute to improving certain deprived neighbourhoods in Évora. Their effects are visible in a functional evolution of the city via the reinforcement of the tourism activities, for example, the number of restaurants, hotels, and craft stores has increased in the past decade. Moreover, more than a dozen companies working in tourism animation have been created. However, the city's needs in terms of urban renovation and socioeconomic attractiveness would require wider interventions and a financially robust investment framework to invert depopulation and demographic aging tendencies [48].

## 5. Discussion

Barcelona has, for many years, been actively engaged with sustainable urban development goals. These have been expressed in numerous city plans, projects, and activities in the areas of sustainability. In essence, Barcelona translates a vision into these strategic sustainable urban development priorities via a strong participatory approach, and the systematic analysis of the city's main challenges. In this regard, the Barcelona ISUD contributes to implementing this strategic vision by focusing on stimulating socioeconomic development via an environmentally sustainable approach, to make socioeconomically and demographically deprived neighbourhoods more attractive, both to economic activities and to the overall population.

One important positive lesson from the Barcelona ISUD is the strong involvement of the citizens and a myriad of actors in the elaboration of the strategy, as a way to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, and also as a way to actively involve all those directly interested in this urban development process. This is not necessarily innovative, since we have witnessed similar processes in other European cities [49], however, the Barcelona example, due to the size of the city, is particularly impressive due to the vast number of involved entities ( $\pm 1000$ ). As such, this vast and comprehensive participatory approach, which includes the citizens, could be presented as an eloquent example of a transferable experience, in particular to large European Metropolitan Areas. Indeed, available literature points to a successful path achieved by the Barcelona Municipality in becoming a smarter city in terms of urban development management, by combining the use of public and private resources [50]. Conversely, the proposed ISUD monitoring and evaluation process appears quite basic, lacking a concrete designed impact assessment methodology. Instead, a simplified number of indicators is advanced, thus allowing the collection of outcomes and results, but not necessarily the expected medium-long term impacts in improving urban development processes in the intervention areas.

In Évora, the ISUD is expected to provide positive impacts in the rehabilitation of certain urban areas, and in particular the historic centre of the city. Although it is not yet possible to make an assessment of the ISUD evaluation, an overview of past Évora urban plans appears to show that their implementation has not significantly contributed to inverting depopulation trends in the historic area or the increasing aging indexes. These urban plans have mostly provided mitigating effects on this depopulation tendency of the city core. A key lesson is that tackling demographic issues requires long term robust financial investment that is focused on a wide range of factors. However, even with such investments in place, mitigation may remain the only realistic long-term impact. These results contribute to a literature that raises important questions in terms of the extent to which EU Cohesion policy's ability to achieve territorial cohesion [51].

In comparison to previous urban planning approaches, however, the Évora ISUD strategy offers some innovative elements. Firstly, the participation of the promoters in acquiring monitoring indicators is one aspect of the strategy design and implementation which might be transferable for interventions in other European cities. Secondly, the multi-level governance process and the inclusion of partners from all economic sectors in a Monitoring Group, although not entirely innovative is, nevertheless, a positive and transferable governance practice. Thirdly, on a less positive prism, there is a 'somewhat

excessive' role of the President in the implementation of the ISUD strategy decision-making process. This can be seen as a sign of unnecessary top down management in a regional capital, which would be expected to have a municipal urban development department with a higher decision-making role.

In all, it is possible to conclude that both the Barcelona and the Évora ISUDs present important and potentially replicable elements of sustainable urban planning, in particular at the level of their participatory approaches. Overall, it can be argued that the process of formulating the ISUD has given an impetus to sustainable strategic planning and development at city level in both cities, supported by extensive consultation of local stakeholders. However, their main impact in achieving the designed strategies requires a deeper analysis based on the examination of the trends of concrete outcome, result, and impact indicators. This evaluation process requires, in our view, wider transparency from both municipalities, since no evaluation reports are yet available for public consultation. As such, it is yet too soon to fully understand how different the effects from the implementation of ISUD are to plans in the analysed case-studies. What is possible to conclude from the collected evidence is that the approach to strategic planning in both cases do not vary widely in terms of structure and substance, since both cities have neighbourhoods facing similar socioeconomic challenges. However, it is crucial to point out that, comparatively speaking, Évora faces far more severe challenges, in particular in its historic centre, which faces severe depopulation trends.

There are a number of important differences in relation to the governance and evaluation procedures used for implementing ISUDs in metropolitan compared medium-sized urban areas. First, metropolitan areas have the potential to depart with a more advantageous position since they normally have already gained wider experience in designing and implementing effective participatory governance approaches with a wider pool of stakeholders and with a wider territorial range of collaboration networks. Second, metropolitan areas have the advantage of having dedicated and operational urban planning structures with higher budgets and personnel. Third, large metropolitan areas can use their financial power to integrate ISUD more effectively and efficiently in their urban planning evaluation procedures, thus potentially leading to a more comprehensive analysis of the ISUD main effects in the territory. On the other hand, medium-sized urban areas have the potential to be more adaptive in terms of the inclusion of key stakeholders. As the stakeholder networks are smaller, meaningful participation can be achieved. However, it is imperative that technical assistance is available to build up the necessary local capacity to fully engage with the ISUD approach.

Reflecting distinct traditions of urban development planning across the EU and the extent to which there are established urban-level institutions capable of leading and implementing a strategic development function, the presented ISUD experiences also demonstrate unique and diverse policy evaluation procedures. This stance makes it even more challenging to compare their main effects. Besides that, both ISUD plans comprise coherent, focused, and area-specific strategies. These are grounded in a detailed analysis of the local socioeconomic and demographic main characteristics, with the identification of both urban development strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the clear and concise policy mission statements proved the possibility to use the proposed methodologic approach to assess their strategic design and implementation in a comparable manner. This embraces the possibility to use the proposed methodical framework to assess the remaining European ISUDs. The final results from the implementation of both analysed ISUDs, however, will ultimately reveal in what measure these strategies are being translated into meaningful urban planning objectives which can be replicated elsewhere.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** List of Évora city and municipality urban development plans since 1980.

Plan	Main Goals	Year
Plano de Recuperação do Centro Histórico	Recover the urban fabric, improve housing conditions, and preserve the historical and cultural heritage. It was decisive for the classification of Évora by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.	1981
Plano Director Municipal (PDM) de Évora	Establish guidelines for planning and development of the entire county. A pioneer plan at national level.	1985
Protocolo entre a Câmara e a Caixa Geral de Depósitos	Grant loans for physical improvement or housing purchases in the Historic Center, with subsidized interest. It was implemented until 1992 and affected 75 houses.	1985
Plano Geral de Urbanização (PGU)	A Component of the PDM that aims to establish the use and transformation of the soil in the urban area.	1985
Revisão do Plano Geral de Urbanização	Proceed to revise the PGU in order to adapt it to the new social and urban realities and future perspectives.	1991
Plano Estratégico de Évora	Transforming Évora into a socially just city, organically integrated in its region and with international projection.	1995
ÉVORACOM	Promote the urban and commercial modernization of the Historic Centre.	1997
Revisão do Plano de Urbanização de Évora	Carry out a new revision of the Urbanization Plan (PUE), which implied changes to the PDM, namely for adjustments to the urban perimeter.	2000
Programa POLIS	Promote landscape requalification of spaces outside the walls between Portas do Raimundo and Portas de Avis.	2001
Estudo de Enquadramento Estratégico para a área do Centro Histórico de Évora	Enable the formulation of a consistent urban rehabilitation and revitalization operation in the Historic Center of Évora, under the motto “Évora: Recover the historical process”.	2008
Revisão do Plano Director Municipal de Évora	Update and deepen the PDM as a municipal regulatory instrument for spatial planning, local development, and the dynamics of spaces.	2008
Plano de Desenvolvimento Estratégico de Évora	Formulate a guiding instrument for the development strategy of the municipality of Évora, with the year 2020 as its reference horizon.	2009
Revisão do Plano de Urbanização de Évora	Proceed with the new revision of the PUE, by introducing changes and adjustments, in view of the current context, and the perspectives and proposals for the development of the city.	2011
Agenda 21 Local	Promote, with the involvement of the various agents, the consultation and formation of partnerships for the construction of a sustainable local development strategy.	2011
Programa Acrópole XXI	Revitalize the urban core of the old wall of the Historic Center of Évora through the promotion of urban regeneration actions.	2011
Plano Estratégico de Desenvolvimento de Évora 2020	Implement a territorial development vision for Évora until 2020.	2014
Plano Estratégico de Desenvolvimento Urbano (PEDU or ISUD in english)	Streamline urban revitalization. Promote the multifunctionality of the traditional city by contributing to the revitalization of the economic fabric and by involving public and private partners. Qualify and integrate central urban areas by encouraging interventions for social inclusion and territorial cohesion.	2015
Publicação da Área de Reabilitação Urbana (ARU) do Centro Histórico de Évora.	Promote urban revitalization of the historical centre area.	2016
Operação de Reabilitação Urbana do Centro Histórico de Évora (ORU)	Promote urban rehabilitation processes in the Urban Rehabilitation Area (ARU) in a phased manner.	2017

Source: Own elaboration based on [27,40].

**Table A2.** Barcelona ISUD main (over 3,000.000€) investment actions and goals.

Thematic Objective	Specific Objective	Funding (€*1000)
2—TIC—Improve access, use and quality of information and communication technologies.	2.3.3—Promote ICT in integrated urban development strategies.	4140
4—Favour the transition to a low-carbon economy in all sectors.	4.5.1—Promotion of sustainable urban mobility.	8000
6—Conserve and protect the environment and promote resource efficiency.	6.3.4—Promote the protection, promotion, and development of the cultural and natural heritage of urban areas.	8276
6—Conserve and protect the environment and promote resource efficiency.	6.5.2—Integrated actions to revitalize cities, to improve the urban environment and its environment.	4788
8—Promote social inclusion and fight poverty.	9.8.2—Physical, economic, and social regeneration of the urban environment in disadvantaged urban areas through urban strategies.	8880

Source: Own elaboration based on [20].

**Table A3.** Évora ISUD main (over 500.000€) investment actions and goals.

Priority	Axis/Measure	Funding (€*1000)
06.05—Improve urban environment	Public Spaces	595
09.08—Physical and socioeconomic regeneration of deprived urban and rural areas	Dwelling requalification for social housing	2144
04.05—Low carbon strategies	Intermodal connection and requalification—Rossio de S. Brás	1081
04.05—Low carbon strategies	Requalification of the modal interface—Porta de Aviz	572
06.05—Improve urban environment	Edifices	11,419
06.05—Improve urban environment	Edifices	6768
06.05—Improve urban environment	Immaterial actions/studies	523

Source: Own elaboration based on [25].

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